

Michaud Speaks about Katahdin Paper Mills on House Floor

Friday, April 15 2011

WASHINGTON, DC – This morning, Congressman Mike Michaud spoke on the House floor about the situation surrounding the paper mills in the Katahdin Region and the need for the U.S. to support a national manufacturing strategy and a new trade policy that focuses on the needs of domestic workers and businesses. “Mr. Speaker, I rise today to express solidarity with the people of the Katahdin Region in my home state of Maine. The paper mill in East Millinocket is shutting down and taking with it hundreds of jobs and much of the tax base.

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“Mr. Speaker, I rise today to express solidarity with the people of the Katahdin Region in my home state of Maine. The paper mill in East Millinocket is shutting down and taking with it hundreds of jobs and much of the tax base.

“Like so many other mills and factories across the country, it couldn’t keep its doors open. In the last decade, our nation has lost nearly 6 million manufacturing jobs and seen 50,000 factories close. It’s because we haven’t prioritized our manufacturing sector and haven’t made an effort to keep good-paying, blue-collar jobs in the U.S.

“I worked at this mill for over 29 years alongside the hardworking people of the Katahdin Region. I rise in solidarity with them today, confident that if we all pull together we can find a way to put this mill back online.

“I urge my colleagues in Congress to help me – and workers in Maine and all over the country – by supporting a national manufacturing strategy and a new trade policy.”

Over the past few weeks, Michaud has worked to turn over every stone to make sure all resources possible are available to the mill workers and the towns, weighing in with the White House, the Department of Commerce, and the Department of Labor and personally requesting they provide any and all support available to reopen the mills and promote economic development in the region.

“I continue to work to exhaust every avenue, consulting local, state, and federal officials in the process,” said Michaud. “I remain hopeful that the governor’s team can find a way forward that preserves these mills and our long tradition of paper making in the region. I stand ready as a committed partner in their efforts.”

Michaud wants to make sure that the short-term needs of the workers and the towns are taken care of, but he’s also focused on getting the mills back up and running and promoting more economic development in the towns long-term.

Michaud previously announced that the U.S. Department of Labor had certified the mill workers for Trade Adjustment Assistance (TAA) benefits. Workers in the mill supply lines are also eligible for TAA benefits, and his office is committed to working with every worker to make sure that he or she applies. While TAA isn’t a silver bullet, it does provide much needed relief to workers, and Michaud wants to get those resources to every single person that qualifies. Unfortunately the TAA for Communities program expired in February, but Michaud is hopeful that the TAA for Community Colleges application being submitted in a few weeks might direct more workforce training funds to the area.

TAA won't cover everyone affected by the mills closing, so it's a positive development that preparations for a National Emergency Grant have already been started. The Millinocket mill closure triggered the approval of an emergency grant in 2008, and the funds just ran out in March. Michaud will be strongly supporting the NEG application and has already alerted the U.S. Department of Labor in Washington, DC to make sure they're aware that an application is in the works.

Michaud has also reached out to the Economic Development Administration (EDA) in order to get the agency to engage on some medium- and longer-term solutions for the mills and the community. He has had extensive conversations with EDA to see if they could channel some economic development funding into the area to help the towns' economies. Although EDA is prohibited from providing funding to a privately owned entities like the mills, Michaud continues to work to see if there are any ways to develop and fund town-based economic development projects.

Michaud has also encouraged exploration of the use of the New Market Tax Credit, as it was helpful to Millinocket in 2003. His hope is that this resource could be used to help establish a biomass facility for the Millinocket mill.

Michaud also looked into options to address the problems with the landfill. He was pleased that General Libby said capping it would be a good training exercise and could be a good way of reducing the landfill costs. However, for this option to work the landfill must be owned by a public entity.

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